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THE WHAT AND THE HOW OF CLASSICAL INSTRUCTION¹

To dispel anxiety, let me say at once that I have no thought of expounding to this learned gathering my classroom methods, my pet devices, or "my policies". *Non ea vis animo*. I simply wish to register and reiterate my belief that in classical instruction there is a good deal of barking up the wrong tree, some baying at the moon, and much mere idle questing through the forest in the vague hope that somewhere and somehow the doves may appear and light upon the golden bough; if, indeed, there be a golden bough, and the object of our sylvan ramble be not just perambulation.

As an antidote to such wandering dreams, let us at once propose to ourselves that we are bent somewhat. The bow drawn at a venture may sometimes bring down the quarry; but such hunting does not have to be controlled by game laws. Accordingly, that I may at least arouse opposition, let me assert that in seven-tenths of the classical instruction given in our schools there is little conscious or intelligent aim, that such direction as it does have comes from an impulse antique and obsolete, and that the greatest enemies of classical learning are the classically learned. I use this term in a broad sense. I do not confine the compliment to those gentlemen whose friendship I unaffectedly prize, whose attainments are my admiration, and whose impenetrability is my despair, the committees on admission to college—not against the embattled chauvinism of these would I now inveigh; but against men of like passions and limitations with myself, against us, who have every reason to know better because we are close to the conditions—in both senses of that word: we, we the pedagogues are to blame. We are to blame because we have not really considered our own problems; or, if we have considered them, because we have not applied our collective wisdom to their solution. There is no pedagogic of Latin teaching in America. A course here and there in a college here and there; a book now and then, but rather then than now; many sporadic and unrelated prophesyings, like the present paper; and with it all the absence of a general conviction as to what must and can be done—that seems to be the status of the scientific practice of classical teaching just now. There is no lack of interest of a certain sort. Attend any convention of classical teachers, and hear us proclaim with fervor that the hidden quantities are tough meat for children of tender years, that forms should be thoroughly learned, that composition is the mother of syntax, and other doctrines equally precious and equally trite. I do not mean to disparage such utterances; these things ought to be said; but they are like the *fliegende*

Blätter of the Cumaean Sibyl, so that we may say with Vergil *inconsulti abeunt*, "it wasn't worth the carfare", *sedemque odere Sibyllae*, "and we found it rather a bore". And no wonder. The masters of our craft have gained breadth of view; they can see the end from the beginning—albeit even they do not all see the same end; but the rank and file, the youngster to whom the Latin of his diploma is still a dark and awful mystery, the teacher of mathematics who helps out the Greek department—what do they know, what can they know of those larger aims and greater possibilities that belong to the study of Greek and Latin, making them, even in this gainsaying and perverse age, the most powerful instruments of education which we can command? And what will be the fate of a teacher thus blindly launching forth upon so perilous a sea? It will be dreary enough and commonplace enough. He will complete a beginners' book; and presently wake to the fact that his pupils lack elementary knowledge. He will go on assigning lessons in Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil; but if the students learn to read it will be no thanks to him. He will dabble fitfully in the grammar, shirk the composition, and hope violently that his pupils may enter college. He will not be contented; but his dissatisfaction will have no power to raise him. He will not necessarily be incurable; but only by good luck will he know where to find a physician.

Out of this happy-go-lucky state of things there should be a way. To give dignity to our quest, let us hear Aristotle's dictum: "Every art and every science, and likewise every act we do and every choice we make aims at some good — ἀγαθὸν τινος ἐφ' ἑσθ' αὖ δοκεῖ. What is the ἀγαθόν τι for the secondary schoolmaster—the final cause which must determine the path of achievement? That there are many causes which contribute to achievement, which render it easier and surer, no one will deny. Broad scholarship, the gift of teaching, personality—these are a trinity of excellences which need no advertisement. But I am thinking just now of the roadbed more than of the rolling-stock; and I venture to assert that the path of success must lead to the mastery of language as distinguished from the reading of prescribed texts. I am not crying down the importance of a study of the literature, or denying that the great contribution which Greece and Rome have made to the modern world is only received when we have entered into the spirit of their deeds and words; I am only insisting that we shall regard education as a process, and that we cannot make very much use of the top rounds of the ladder until we have passed those lower down. Even if self-examination leaves us personally and pleasantly serene, are we not at least ready to admit that our friends are all too prone to regard the Latin course as a progression from author to author, with garnishings of grammar

¹ This paper was read at the annual meeting of The Classical Association of New England, at Smith College, on April 3, 1908.

and composition, instead of an orderly development, passing from stage to stage of linguistic knowledge? In the first year, it is true, we proceed rationally enough. Beginners' books are essentially unfoldings of principles; the teacher, if he is worth his salt—I did not say his salary, for it would be a poor teacher indeed who was not worth that—but the teacher who has any conception of his duty puts forth his utmost skill to acquaint his class with the initial peculiarities of the language and to lead them to think by Attic or Roman laws. The raw facts of Latin, paradigms and rules, are rubbed in or driven home, according to temperament; a compact body of truth is put before the child, something almost as concrete as his breakfast, if superficially less attractive. Then comes the great gulf fixed between the island of the beginners' book and the continents of Latin literature. Caesar is, perhaps, the nearest headland; and the child must reach this point on a raft built of the little knowledge he has acquired, while tumultuous waves of syntax threaten to engulf him. Avoiding as by a miracle any reference to *rari nantes*, let us hasten to observe that there is small wonder if the young sailor hails as angelic the friendly helper that would translate him to the other side; or, recoiling in terror from the dangerous voyage, abandons the attempt.

Leaving the figure (for I am an indifferent sailor), let us see what is to be done. I shall not presume to approve or condemn existing devices, but posit at once the statement that there is salvation in continuity of method. Gradual, regular, and rational additions to the body of facts already learned must accompany every step of the progress into the unexplored country. The beginners' book ought not to be an island, but the point of a peninsula. There will be different ways of effecting this geographical change—of building the mole that shall bring safety to the inland voyage. Personally, I think that we ought to make a division of labor. There are certain things which a pupil can reasonably be expected to learn by himself with a fair prospect of success. There are others which are more scientifically done in the classroom. Speaking broadly, I should say that it is the teacher's especial province to teach the art of reading, and that almost everything else is proper material for assigned work. Theoretically, composition ought also to be done under skilled supervision but as a matter of fact, the sentences in most elementary composition books are so carefully adapted to the pupil's ability that he can be expected to do something with them; while living Latin or Greek are idiomatic, and therefore labyrinthine. Whether this statement is accepted or not, we should probably agree that, other things being equal, the pupil had best do by himself those things which he can do well, and with a prospect of the interest that comes with success. The good work recently done

by Messrs. Browne and Lodge in preparing vocabularies of high school Latin adds an important item to the list of things suitable for outside preparation; and I find that pupils take kindly to such work because they can see its bearing on their progress. The memorizing of grammatical facts is work of the same class, and likewise the review and final preparation of reading matter already worked over by the instructor. I hope I shall be pardoned for saying these very obvious things: they seem to be necessary to a complete statement.

A recitation falls naturally into three parts: drill, quiz, and teaching. The quiz or test is a necessary spur and a means of diagnosis; drill needs no apology; but the supreme task and pleasure is the actual development of a new subject, the reading of new text, the free question and answer into which no thought of marks intrudes. It is probably superfluous to say that in reading the next day's advance part will be translated by the class at sight, part, too hard for such treatment, thoroughly explained by the teacher, and common expressions passed over without translation so as to emphasize the fact that these are phrases "every child should know". A new word-list is a fruitful topic, every device of association with Latin, English, and French being employed to fix the vocabulary in the mind.

To revert to the subject of composition, its place is fixed by the idea of language-study now under consideration. Composition is not a by-product of reading; it is not an end in itself; it is not merely a drastic remedy for syntactical prostration; it is part of the process begun in the first year and kept up till the necessary facts are learned; and it should therefore continue and expand the method of the beginners' book. It will at first be intensely formal; it may gradually lose its cut-and-dried air as facility is gained; I cannot see that it is ever safe to discontinue it with average high-school classes. As regards method,

"There are nine-and-sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right".

Some are more right than others, but I forbear. Enough to say that composition is a plant with three roots, whereof one is grammar, and another vocabulary, and the third idiom, while the blossom (considerably rarer than the bloom of the century plant) is style.

As the student advances, the ratio of work done under the teacher's guidance to that performed alone will steadily decrease. Armed with a definite vocabulary, with definite knowledge of syntax, and with definite accomplishments in the arts of reading and translating, he will lean less and less upon the teacher, and find a growing enjoyment in doing things for himself. He has not been babied, but he has been properly equipped and trained. The

teacher, for his part, will find increasing opportunity for the humane aspects of his work, for developing the classical atmosphere and a true perspective, and for opening vistas into the wider fields of learning.

Details of method cannot be prescribed. *Sua cuique deus fit dira cupido*. The trouble is that so many lack the *dira cupido*—that they permit themselves to imagine that they can possibly arouse interest in something which does not interest them. There is no more electric remedy for a class gone stale than for the teacher to treat himself to a vigorous cross-country run through some unfamiliar book. Macaulay's idea of being a scholar was to read Greek with one's feet on the fender. The teacher who has worked too microscopically will find that he can win elasticity and breadth by throwing his lexicon into a corner (free from bric-a-brac) and plunging unaided through masses of Latin or Greek. Incidentally he will be the better able to appreciate the troubles of his own scholars. For the same reason, it is well for one to begin some new language as often as he finds himself becoming impatient with his pupils' progress.

Such, then, are the foundations of a true method: first, that one shall have both a goal and an itinerary; second, that he shall advance thither, always with due regard to little Iulus, who follows *non passibus aequis*; and last, and perhaps most, that he shall keep his own mind fresh, moving, and vigorous.

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MASTER VERGIL

From the Atlantic Monthly of December, 1905, we reprint the following, thinking it may call forth some comment. It is not the less interesting or suggestive from the fact that it is the utterance of one whose primary business now is the teaching of English.

For traveling company most books, like most people, are too exacting. They will not yield to a mood; they will be asserting themselves against us, or tugging us aside. And why travel, especially afoot, if one cannot be lord of his day? Therefore, because it is serenely complaisant, trust the paler allurements of pure art. Take with you some fair book not human enough to challenge you on your road. Manon Lescaut has the simplicity of perfect breeding, a lovely purity of style for no considerable matter. Or take the Sentimental Journey, if you have forgotten who wrote it. But I will always take the epic of travel, the Aeneid.

It may be the foredoom of artificial epic that it should live, if at all, by style alone. That all literature lives by style is a platitude; but in the Aeneid the import of the matter was so thin at first, that it has long been threadbare. If the

Paradise Lost was ever a moulding moral force, it is probably that no longer. The epic of rebellion against a doctrinaire God touches our time only in so far as its cold heresy is lost in its high beauty. Vergil's gods were from the beginning purely *ex machina*; his hero is alien to us; but no verse, unless it be Milton's, wins the ear more masterfully. No wonder it seemed to the Middle Ages an incantation.

The purely artistic pleasure in art is given by the Aeneid undisturbed. Homer is human, giving a pleasure as of realism, and now and again searching the heart; Vergil, where he is human at all, is so romantically, as in the poignant fourth book. Habitually he moves but splendid shadows in armor through a colored landscape.

. . . Splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.

This soothing of our souls is not shadowed by the unreal cares of the unreal Aeneas. When the ships are scattered in that magnificently theatrical storm, and the warriors, cast dripping on the beach, instead of cooking plain food over a fire of sticks,

. . . arida circum

Nutrimenta dedit, rapuitque in fomite flammam.

Tum Cererem corruptam undis Cerealiaque arma

Expediunt fessi rerum;

we have already forgotten them for the scenery:

Est in secessu longo locus: insula portum

Efficit obiectu laterum, quibus omnis ab alto

Frangitur inque sinus scindit sese unda reductos.

Hinc atque hinc vastae rupes geminique minantur

In caelum scopuli, quorum sub vertice late

Aequora tuta silent; tum silvis scaena coruscis

Desuper, horrentique atrum nemus imminet umbra.

Fronte sub adversa scopulis pendentibus antrum;

Intus aquae dulces, vivoque sedilia saxo.

And see how alien the hero is from us when for rare moments we are troubled by a transpiring of personality, and how little he means to us as a personality in the sum of the whole. For this the crux is the episode of Dido, surely the greatest book of all, the most cogently artistic in narrative, the most glowing in figure, the most remarkable in verse. Dido is a woman. Has Vergil another? Beside this passionate creation set in high romance the pious Aeneas becomes real enough to be despised; then, as he slinks off behind the divine will, he lapses again into armor speaking platitude. Doubtless this impression is due in part to race. The Latin hero leaves us wondering and cold, is not to us heroic. The southern nations seem to keep a different standard of heroic love, to value ardor more than the northern constancy, and withal to be more demonstrative of feeling in speech than is found of us of the north consistent with heroic strength. Chaucer, whose Cressid is one of the most human figures in fiction, can make little of Troilus. Only Shakespeare has leaped this bar-